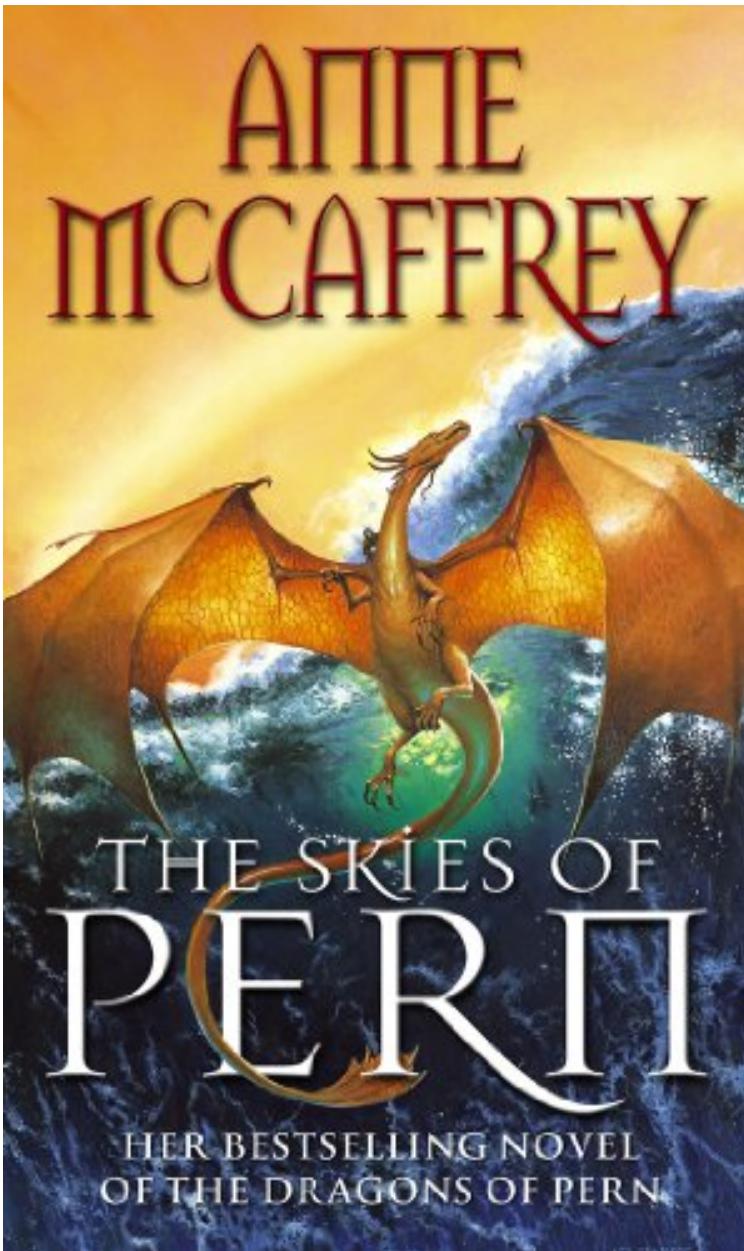


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# The Skies Of Pern



*Par Anne McCaffrey*  
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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurA new age is dawning on Pern, for since the dragons have changed the orbit of the Red Star, the horrors of Threadfall will soon be a thing of the past. But even as the dragon riders are trying to decide what their future role will be, further dangers are beginning to emerge, as those calling themselves the Abominators plot together to destroy all the learning that has been discovered from the records of the Old Ones.Their first vicious assault is on the Healer Halls - irrevocable damage is done and it is obvious that this is a worldwide movement with a dangerous mind leading those who would destroy all of the new

knowledge. And now comes a fresh and terrible catastrophe - a large cometary fragment is hurtling towards Pern and cannot be deflected. Everyone - dragons, riders, holders and craftsmen - must stand by to perform a giant rescue operation. As F'lessan, son of Lessa and F'lar, plays his heroic part in the events that follow, he is helped by Tai, his new weyrmate. But it is the dragons, bronze Golanth and the brilliant green Zaranth, who will provide the solution to the dangers of the skies.

**Extrait One A Dark Dream in Blue**

This was not how it happened. For one, the two moons were not in the sky: Belior and Timor had set long ago and it was early morning. But here, now, in her dream, the moons bathed the plain with their eerie light and awkward double shadows. In her dream she could see under the ground. She could see tunnels and hives, teeming with life as the six-legged, slithering tunnel snakes dug their way to their prize--the dragon eggs nestled on the surface in sand-filled beds that were not nearly as safe as their guardians had believed. The dragon eggs that were the hope of Pern. She wanted to shout, to scream a warning, but she was ghostlike, standing horrified sentinel over her sleeping form. Above in the night sky, the Red Star pulsed malignantly far beyond the two pale moons. When the Red Star drew closer, Thread would fall. Thread. Voracious, all-consuming. A touch of it burnt through flesh and clothing, even tough dragon-hide. It could drain a lush valley of all life in a day. Unchecked, it would consume all life on Pern. It drowned in water, froze on ice--and perished by flaming dragons breath. Without the dragons these eggs held, there would be too few dragons left to protect the world from Thread. Even in her dream, Xhinna felt her blue dragon, Tazith, stir and try to follow her feelings. She turned to where he lay sprawled nearby and smiled. She was the first woman to ride blue in all memory, and as she looked at him, her heart swelled with love and pride. Brown dragons and bronzes always chose male riders, just as the gold queen dragons chose female riders. According to Tradition, the blues and greens were also ridden only by males. But times had changed. A sickness had risen, a sickness that killed dragons. They had fallen by the hundreds even as the first Fall of Thread in the new Third Pass required dragons to fly and flame to save Pern. It was only through the genius of Lorana that a cure had been found, created in an unprecedented cross-time collaboration with the original colonists. The price of Lorana's success had been her own queen dragon. When a dragon died... It is like having your soul ripped apart. The thought was so terrible that Xhinna whimpered. She turned in surprise to see her sleeping self whimper and then--She was awake, shivering. Are you okay? Taria asked sleepily. You were having a nightmare. Im okay, Xhinna said. Taria wrapped her arms around her and pulled her close. You're freezing. Just a bad dream. In the morning the eggs were gone. Their shattered remains had been dumped in the sea, empty. Only twenty-three of the two hundred and fifty-three eggs had hatched; the rest had been ruptured, their contents devoured by tunnel snakes burrowing up from the ground. This never would have happened in the high rocky Weys where the dragons usually lived, but here, on the uncharted plains of the Eastern Isle, the ground was too soft, the way too easy, and the tunnel snakes were too greedy. The sun warmed her as she scanned the now-empty plain, but Xhinna shivered as she saw once again, in her memory, cluster after cluster of lifeless, dead eggs, their vitals destroyed by the voracious tunnel snakes. She remembered the desperate fight, the cries, the screams of agony, and the few--very, very few--triumphs in this one-sided disaster. She turned as a baby dragonet gave a plaintive cry that was instantly answered by a consoling voice. Qinth, the only green to hatch, had been severely mauled by the tunnel snakes before it was freed by Jeriz--Jriz, now that he'd impressed the grievously wounded dragon. Its okay, shh, little one, you'll do fine! blond-haired Bekka said soothingly to both dragon and rider. She was small and young for a healer, but she made up for lack of stature and age with a fierce determination and a stubborn resolve never to lose a ward. Her mother was a midwife; her father had been a dragonrider, until the dragon sickness had taken his blue Serth. If they were here, now, because of Lorana, then it was Jriz's father, Tenniz, who had set her on the way. Tenniz was one of the rare traders born with the gift of the Sight--the strange gift that gave glimpses of the future. With his Sight, Tenniz had recognized Lorana, had helped set her on the path that had led her and all the other Turns into the past and to the eastern of the two Great Isles--low-lying masses that had remained untouched by humans for hundreds of Turns. Jriz did not have the gift of the Sight--that had gone to his younger sister, Jirana. Ten Turns was unusually young for Sight to manifest, but this adult responsibility did not prevent Jirana from being an extremely outgoing and passionate child. Xhinna loved both of them like a big sister, and the terrible plight of Jriz's green dragonet, Qinth, tore at her heart. Despite Bekka's cheerful manner, Xhinna could think of no other dragon so horribly injured that had survived. She feared that Jriz might be a dragonrider for less than a sevenday. If only the tunnel snakes had not attacked! Why had Tenniz, with his Sight, sent Lorana and the others here if not to find a way to repopulate the Weys of Pern? Instead--now--Xhinna found herself wandering around a too-large camp wondering when and how she and the others

would return to the present Third Pass and back to the losing battle against Thread. We haven't got enough food, Taria said to Xhinna later that morning, raising her voice to be heard over the creeling weyrlings. Well send a party to round up some of the herdbeasts, Xhinna said. The assault of the tunnel snakes and the rampage by the Mrreows had broken the fencing around the camps herdbeasts and those that hadn't been killed had run off. Who? Taria asked, looking around. It took Xhinna a moment for the significance of the question to sink through--of all the dragons in the camp, only her Tazith and Tarias Coranth were old enough to fly. We should have kept more people behind for guard, Xhinna muttered to herself. She knew that Weyrleader Tmar had planned to send a group back to them as soon as the dragonriders had settled once more in Telgar Weyr. No one had expected the strange knot that had sprung up between, trapping both the returning Eastern Weyr dragonriders and the lost, presumed dead, dragonriders led by the old Weyrleader, Dgan. The knot had been broken, but only after Weyrwoman Fiona had jumped off her queen, Talenth, into the nothingness of between in order to send Talenth back to Lorana. It had been Lorana who had figured out how to break the jam and free the trapped dragonriders--old and new--but in the ensuing events, no one had thought to reinforce those who remained behind with Xhinna. She shrugged. I guess it's up to you and me. If we had Jper or Jkeran-- Taria began hopefully. We don't, Xhinna cut her off in irritation. Jper and Jkeran were experienced brown riders who'd gone back with Fiona and Lorana to Telgar Weyr in the present Turn. Xhinna frowned as she realized that after living for three Turns on the Eastern Island, they had nearly caught up to the present time. So we do what's needed. She managed a smile for her friend. As always. Taria heaved an aggrieved sigh, but said nothing else, instead turning toward her green. At least Tazith and Coranth are small enough that we can get low to the ground, Xhinna said, making a herding gesture with one arm. Kdan, Xhinna called before mounting her blue, were going to see about finding some food. The harper nodded, seeming at a loss for words as he looked around the camp. Xhinna guessed at the worries in his mind, saw the way he pulled little Tiona and Kimar toward him while at the same time consoling his bronze Lurenth. It took them the better part of an hour to round up a measly half-dozen herdbeasts. They had scarcely got them back into the half-repaired corral before Kdan and Rney started the butchering necessary to feed the ravenous weyrlings. A line formed of anxious riders, eagerly looking for anything to carry back to their dragonets. As soon as there was a free moment, Xhinna approached Kdan. Were going to need you to take charge of the weyrlings. Weyrleader, dragonrider, father, harper, Kdan said with a grin. I think I'm being underworked. Xhinna smiled at the first expression of humor the older man had shown all day. I could take a skiff out fishing, Colfet offered. The white-haired seaman had wandered the camp in the aftermath of the tunnel snake and Mrreow attack, offering what help he could where he could. He knew nothing of dragons and less of weyrlings, but he was an inveterate scrounger and he had the knack for organizing that Xhinna adored in anyone. His age alone was a source of comfort to the many younger, disconcerted new dragonriders--so many of them had just recently been orphaned, and all of them, save for Jriz and Kdan, had until the previous day never even imagined being at a Hatching, let alone Impressing a dragon. Xhinna felt bad for all the others who had been here the day before--hundreds, for they needed at least as many Candidates as there were dragon eggs waiting to hatch. So many had come, eager for the chance to Impress a dragon, expecting to see the largest hatching on Pern--only to be so tragically disappointed. Fiona had been right to insist that they be returned to their homes immediately. If it hadn't been for the Weyrwoman's foresight, the camp would have had more hungry, confused faces in it at the moment. Not that Xhinna wouldn't have welcomed at least a few extra faces, Fiona's first amongst all of them. As the problems of setting up a camp and recovering from the disaster of the day before settled upon Xhinna's shoulders, she had only greater respect for the heavy burdens that Fiona had borne uncomplainingly, despite being thrust so young into the role of Weyrwoman. Somehow, lunch was arranged, and the camp's pavilion was restored to its position of prominence. It would have to be moved, though--the very next day, Xhinna swore. The beached ships that for three Turns had served as onshore homes had seemed such a good idea, but now they seemed ominous and foreboding--traps for people, and targets for both ravenous tunnel snakes and Mrreows. We need to get out of here, Xhinna said in a quiet conversation with Taria and Kdan over lunch. She made a face as she glanced around the too-large camp. This place is too exposed. The tunnel snakes will come back, as will the Mrreows. The weyrlings can't fly for a month, Kdan reminded her. Xhinna sighed. Couldn't we have Tazith and Coranth carry them? Taria gave her a skeptical look, but Kdan nodded, a grin spreading across his face. His smile faded almost as quickly as it had appeared. And when the others come back? How will they find us? And we're not going to be so few when they return, Taria added. So we'll want to find a place large enough for us all and close to food. Xhinna mulled their words over, then said, We could

go back to the rocky promontory. I cant imagine Fiona sending more than a wing. A wing, roughly thirty dragons, would be more than enough support for the young weyrlings. The rocky promontory was the place where the draognriders had first come when theyd arrived at Eastern Isle. But it had proved too confined for all the dragons and so theyd moved to their present location on the plains. Now, the promontorys isolated location would provide a safeguard against tunnel snakes and Mrreows both. It was hard for Xhinna, after living three Turns back in time on this Eastern Isle, to imagine the huge, lofty, rocky Weys where dragons usually lived. She could easily picture a wing of dragons, even a Flight--three wings organized into a group large enough to handle a single Fall of Thread--but the full Weyr with its bustling weyrfolk, dragonets, halls, kitchen, and incessant activity seemed a distant, near-dreaming memory. Life at what theyd come to call Eastern Weyr had been more demanding on the dragons and riders than was normal. Not only had the dragons of Eastern Weyr needed to train and learn to fight Thread, but theyd also been needed to hunt for food, build lodgings, find firewood, and do all the myriad other things that the weyrfolk did at a regular Weyr. There wasnt a dragon or rider at Eastern Weyr who didnt have a deep and abiding respect for ordinary weyrfolk. I imagine youre right, Kdan said. Although itll be Tmar who does the choosing. Weyrleader Tmar had the responsibility for the disposition of dragons and their riders while Weyrwoman Fiona dealt with the day-to-day operations of the Weyr and its weyrfolk. Well have to leave Qinth behind, Bekka said as Xhinna came back for her last journey to bring the weyrlings to the rocky promontory. Shed chosen that location as their new camp--the same one that had been rejected as being too small and too exposed when theyd first settled on the Eastern Isle. With just the two grown dragons and twenty-three weyrlings, it seemed spacious. Shes too fragile yet to move. Xhinna swore; she should have thought of that. Bekka smiled at her, shaking her head. Youre doing fine. Kdan, Colfet, and I will stay with her and Jriz. Well see how shes doing in the morning. Then we can see about rigging a wagon or something to move her. Shell still be here in the morning? Xhinna asked, pitching her voice for Bekkas ears alone. Well do our best, the young healer told her earnestly. The night on the promontory was colder than Xhinna had feared. She, Taria, and Rney kept watch in rotation. Xhinna jumped at every untoward sound. When the sun finally broke through the cloud layer at dawn, her eyes had dark circles under them from fatigue. Im going to check on the others, she said as soon as she was certain that Taria was awake. She jumped up on Tazith, and in a moment she was fighting off the bracing cold of between--and then, just as quickly, she emerged in the air over their old camp. The fire had gone out. There was no sign of Kdan, Jriz, Bekka, and Colfet. They were gone. Desperation mounting, she had Tazith fly in a widening circle. She checked every one of their old ship-dwellings; Tazith called for Pinorth, for Lurenth, for Qinth, but got no response. Xhinna directed Tazith to fly out to the sea, where she searched for a sail but found none. Finally, in response to Coranths increasingly nervous queries, she returned to the cold stone promontory. *Revue de presse PRAISE FOR ANNE McCAFFREY AND TODD McCAFFREY* Dragons Time SF grand master McCaffrey and her son Todd combine their prodigious storytelling talents to craft a complex tale of desperation and sacrifice, love and loss. Library Journal (starred review) Dragons Fire These fabled dragons still cast a spell. Publishers Weekly Dragon Harper Captivating . . . The McCaffreys are well known for their brilliant characterizations, and they do not disappoint here. Booklist